

80 years and 100,000 meters

Bluebonnet celebrates milestones, members re-elect 4 board members

By Will Holford

More than 600 Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative members and guests filled The Silos on 77 event center in Giddings on May 14 for the co-op's Annual Meeting. They enjoyed live music and took home 40 door prizes, in addition to conducting important business that culminated with the re-election of four directors.

Board Chairman Ben Flencher opened the business portion of the meeting by thanking Bluebonnet's members for their support during the past 80 years.

"It is an honor for me and my fellow directors to serve on Bluebonnet's board," Flencher said. "In my 32 years on Bluebonnet's Board of Directors, this is the most exciting one so far. We are celebrating our 80th anniversary and an-

other important milestone we achieved last month, surpassing the 100,000-meter mark for the first time in our history."

Flencher told meeting attendees that the co-op's directors are an extension of Bluebonnet's members because they know them from church, school, work, sports leagues and other civic activities.

"Because we have those relationships, every action that we take, every decision that we make, every vote that we cast is done with your best interests first and foremost," he said.

Three incumbent directors in this year's Board election were unopposed and elected by general consent in accordance with Bluebonnet's bylaws: Ben Flencher, District 5, Burleson County; Kenneth Mutscher, District 7, Washington County; and Milton Shaw, District 1, Caldwell, Gonzales, Guadalupe and Hays counties. Incumbent Director Debbi Goertz, District 3, Bastrop County, defeated three challengers in her bid for re-election. Sadly, shortly after his re-election, Mutscher passed away after a brief illness. Read more about his life and tenure on the Board on Page 23.

"I am honored to have received so

much support from Bluebonnet's members," Goertz said. "The last few years serving on Bluebonnet's Board has been a whirlwind. I am looking forward to continuing the wonderful work this Board and all the dedicated employees are doing to serve our members."

Bluebonnet is a member-owned electric cooperative governed by an 11-member Board. Bluebonnet's members elect their directors, who serve staggered three-year terms. One-third of the 11-member Board of Directors is up for election every year. More than 6,900 members participated in this year's Annual Meeting, voting by proxy or casting votes during the meeting.

Flencher also introduced a video tribute to his predecessor as Board chairman, Director Rick Schmidt, who died in February. "Rick was one of Bluebonnet's strongest supporters. He led Bluebonnet through some of the co-op's most difficult, challenging times. His presence on our Board will be missed and can never truly be replaced," Flencher said.

General Manager Matt Bentke closed out the business portion of the meeting with a report on the co-op's service to its members and communities, and its financial and operational strengths. Highlights of Bluebonnet's performance included saving members \$3.4 million in wholesale power costs in 2018, and more than \$8.3 million in the past



Bluebonnet member John Gardner, above, talks about the solar panels on his Brenham-area home with member service representative Brittany Hardy. Before the meeting began, members stopped by displays and information tables where they could see vintage appliances, learn about tree trimming, see linemen's equipment or update their contact information. At right, Rosalinda Serrano of Cedar Creek talks with General Manager Matt Bentke before the meeting. Below, a crowd of more than 600 attended the meeting.



At left, Bluebonnet lineman Matt Hollingsworth, dressed in full gear, poses for a photo with Gertrude Nowak during Bluebonnet's Annual Meeting on May 14. The canvas behind them features a 1945 photo of the co-op's original headquarters in Giddings. Above, Patricia Rodriguez of Cedar Creek votes in the Board election. Sarah Beal photos

three years. Bluebonnet worked hard to significantly reduce its annual operating expenses and return \$5.4 million in capital credits to members last year, Bentke said.

"Capital credits are what makes us a co-op," he said. "We charge no more than is necessary, we run our business very efficiently, and anything left over goes back to our members in capital credits."

Bluebonnet's record growth in the past two years has benefitted members, Bentke said, by enabling the co-op to reinvest in its electric grid, technology, employees and communities, without raising rates.

"We haven't had a rate increase in several years, and we presented our Board a five-year plan with no distribution rate increase in it," he said. "Our expectations are high; our performance standards are high. We will continue to work hard to control expenses and be more efficient for our members every single day." n



At left, Bluebonnet Board Chairman Ben Flencher begins the business of the Annual Meeting. Above, the winners of a 2010 Ford F-150 truck are Manuel Rodriguez of Dale and wife Rosalinda. The vehicle was retired from the co-op's fleet and was awarded after a random drawing from among the more than 6,900 members who voted in Board elections, either by proxy or at the Annual Meeting.